

Discussion on Separation and Unity of Labor and Practice

HOU Jiying^{[a],*}

^[a]Doctor of Philosophy, School of Marxism, Shandong University of Finance and Economics, Jinan, China.

*Corresponding author.

Received 25 September 2015; accepted 18 November 2015
Published online 26 December 2015

Abstract

Aristotle is the originator of traditional practical philosophy, while Marx is the founder of contemporary practical philosophy. They present the relationship of criticism and inheritance each other, but their class stands are opposite. Aristotle keeps to the standpoint of exploiting class, and strictly separates “practice” and “labor”. Labor is kept in the status of being criticized and demoted. However, Marx keeps to the standpoint of laboring people, and can see the internal connection between labor and practice. The research on practice from the perspective of labor helps to achieve the “labor into practice” and internal unity of labor and practice.

Key words: Practice; Labor; Labor into practice

Hou, J. Y. (2015). Discussion on Separation and Unity of Labor and Practice. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 9(6), 66-69. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/8058>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/8058>

INTRODUCTION

In the West, practical philosophy was initiated by Aristotle. He constructed the first practical philosophy in the history of western philosophy, and initiated the tradition of practical philosophy. However, the founder of western contemporary practical philosophy must be Marx, and he exactly completed the turning of practical philosophy. By comparison of both two, we can find that for Aristotle, practice and labor were strictly divided, while labor was kept in the status of being criticized

and demoted. However, Marx’s researches on practice just proceeded with labor, and his superiority lay in that he could see the internal connection between labor and practice, and can achieve the internal unity of labor and practice by endowing labor with the connotation of labor. By “labor into practice”, Marx expressed such a stand and expectation:

All including plain citizens in the middle and lower class can be subject bodies and be included in the practice system. They can be engaged in practice and labor in the meantime and they even meet the internal requirements of practice, just like those rational and mature ones. (Liu, 2009, p.9)

1. “PRACTICE” FROM PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF ARISTOTLE

The word practice had appeared in the west long ago, but initially it was just an everyday concept used to indicate everything lives. First of all, the man who inspected practice as a philosophical concept was the originator of traditional practical philosophy, Aristotle, and he could see the essential differences between human activity and non human existence activity—“human activity was a kind of psychic realized activity and practice that accorded with logic” (Aristotle, 2003, p.20), then this concept was limited to human activity range, which meant it was unique to human activity. Therefore, “practical philosophy is human philosophy”. In *Ethika Nikomachea*, Aristotle further divided human activity into three basic modes, including theory, practice and creation. Theory mainly meant observation and meditation; practice mainly meant politics and ethic activity; while creation mainly meant production and skill activity. In these three kinds of activities, Aristotle paid particular attention to the difference between practice and creation. In his opinion, “practice was not a kind of production, and production was not a kind of practice” (Ibid., p.171). First, he acknowledged that both practice and creation tended to

purpose, but their connection modes with purpose were fundamentally different: Production took manufacturing products as purpose which meant outward things. Purpose is kept outside of activity, and consequence was superior to activity. Activity itself was the means for achieving certain external purpose, and purpose and means present binary opposition, so creation was a kind of utilitarian activity; however, the purpose of practice was kept out of external powers, just inside the activity. "The favorable practice itself was the purpose", and purpose and means keep directly identical, so practice was a kind of over utilitarian activity. "Practice was the activity including purpose achieving" (Ibid., p.178), so it was a kind of free activity which was related to human nature. In terms of Hellenes, human essence is the inherent general stipulation of kindness, virtue and justice related to moral life and political life. Accordingly, in the eyes of Aristotle, practice, as a political and ethical activity, was the free citizens' social intercourse behavior that has got rid of the natural needs and was a kind of life style that subjects reached a consensus or understanding by language communication to solve the problems of cities and individuals. Therefore, Aristotle's practice philosophy was a kind of ethical political philosophy. If the practice was the free activity of the subjects, then the production was the unfree objective activity. It expressed that human production and technical activities reflected the people's transformation behavior on things, which was the process where craftsmen, artisans and other freemen transformed a variety of natural substances into useful articles or crafts by the use of a certain kind of "skills". In this way, Aristotle completely separated the practice of ethical and political activities with the production and technical activities.

From Aristotle's study on practice, it can be seen that in his philosophy of practice, there was no concept of labor. What he called as "creation" referred to the production activities of craftsmen, artisans and other free people, while labor was simply the thing slaves had to do. However, slaves were not treated as people and not included in the concept of "human" studied by Aristotle. As a result, the labor of slaves had no "human nature" and did not belong to human's activities.

2. THE "LABOR" COMPREHENDED BY ARISTOTLE'S PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY- SEPARATION WITH "PRACTICE"

The initial meaning of labor was toil and pain. Greek word Ponos (labor) meant strenuousness and displeasure, which had the similar root as that of poor (penia). In the eyes of ancient Greece, labor was that kind of activity that human beings had to do to meet their living needs, so

that it was the most humble activity that severely bound people's freedom. Ancient Greek people's understanding of labor was linked to the "Publicness and Privatness Theory". In *Politics*, Aristotle pointed out that in the community consisting of men, women, masters and slaves, households were the first that came into being. The village was then formed afterwards when many households were combined in order to obtain more than the necessities of life. Similarly, the cities came into being when many villages constituted a complete community for a better life. The boundary between households and cities was clear. The household was a natural community established on blood relationship, and its main content was economic management. Its main characteristic was that people "were driven" by their own needs and desires, and its function was to guarantee that human's natural desire, namely survival and development, was to be satisfied in a way that males gained food for survival while females gave birth to and brought up children for continuous development. These home affairs were out of peremptory natural inevitability and had to be done, which were not free, completely private and were not allowed to be intervened because it belonged to personal sphere. Cities, corresponding to households, belonged to a special state form and referred to autonomous group of citizens. In cities, people got rid of natural and biological needs, shared the equal status as the identity of citizens, and talked about public affairs in the way of action and discourses, which presented the freedom state beyond slavery and reflected the public characters among people. This belonged to the public sphere. Therefore, the demarcation between households and cities was actually a confrontation between the private and public sphere. The purpose of labor was to obtain the necessities, and it was the activity that had to be done, which belonged to the private sphere. However, humans were political animals. True humanity can only be reflected in public political life and true freedom only existed in the public sphere. As a result, labor was a limitation on citizen's freedom. For the purpose of working on free activities, Athenian citizens had slaves and women who deserved no human appellation to undertake the labor. It had nothing to do with human's freedom.

Based on above-mentioned Arendt pointed out that

He did not deny slaves' ability of being human, instead, he believed those who had to work for necessities of life did not deserve the "human" appellation. Animal labor was actually one of those animals and more advanced. That's all. (Arendt, 1999, p.81)

That was to say, they were barely a sort of "tools" as livestock. Their labor had no "human nature" and did not belong to human's activities. Aristotle's practical philosophy was the "philosophy of human nature", therefore, labor was excluded from his practical

philosophy, and thus labor and practice was divided into two different fields.

3. MARX'S PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY: UNIFICATION OF "LABOR" AND "PRACTICE"

The uniqueness of Marx's practical philosophy was to find out the inherent relation between labor and practice in the practical philosophy of Aristotle, and gave labor the meaning of practice, as well as put the labor in the position of practice. Besides, he also regarded labor as the most basic content of practice and the foundation of other practical activities. As Arendt said, Marx challenged the gods and the traditional evaluation of labor, getting labor to the supreme position that rose from the lowest status that most people looked down upon to one of the most respectable human activities.

In Marx's view, the reason that Aristotle adopted a consistent rejection of labor and understood it as un-free activity opposing to practice was that the exploiting class stand, the real social stratification and social stratification were hidden behind his attitude. Aristotle separated practice with labor strictly in the theory actually meant that the division and confrontation between slaves and masters, the families and the cities, the public and private sphere, differed in hierarchies. The boundaries were clearly demarcated and the gap was impassable. To belittle the former and build up the latter was Aristotle's consistent stand, which was closely linked with his class status.

Different from tradition, Marx stood in the laboring people's position in the lowest class to explain his practical philosophy. He declared human's freedom and dignity starting from the ordinary labors instead of the ruling class. Marx disagreed Aristotle in his viewpoint that those not engaged in ethical and political activities were not real human, instead, he pointed out that those not engaged in production of material goods were not real human. He believed: (a) The nature of any species was the essence of life, and for humans, the essence lied in his production, which meant human was the existence that produced their life as an object and labor were activity that produced life. Accordingly, labor should become its own purpose and the purpose of life itself, and also become the free and autonomous activity unified with the existence of human. (b) Labor was a kind of emotional and objective activity, and the objectification and actualization of human's essential power. Human's "essential power" existed for itself as a subjective ability, which determined that the purpose of activities of human being was human itself. Thus, labor was the objective activity that confirmed human itself and pointed at freedom. Marx had said that "the object of labor was the objectification of human life. Human can dualism itself in spirit in an active and

realistic manner so that he can keep a view of itself in the world he created (Marx, 2000, p.58). Therefore, humans kept confirming and expressing themselves in their own activities and labor were the manifestation and enjoyment of free life. Here, Marx pointed out the free dimension of labor and defined it as "free and autonomic activities" in terms of attributes, and the purpose of labor was for the humans themselves. That was to say, in the sense that labor was the self generation of humans, the labor process itself became the purpose, and the purpose was itself. Therefore, labor should be the people's well-being, and it carried and highlighted the essential requirements of the people's free life. In *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts in 1844*, Marx elaborated the free dimension of labor from the perspective of "animal production" and "human production". "Animals produced according to the dimension of its species and demands, while humans knew how to produce according to the dimension of any species and applied to inner dimension in the objects; accordingly, humans created in line with the rules of beauty." "Rules of beauty" were exactly the embodiment of "freedom" (Ibid.). In this way, Marx converted the activity with only method value in traditional practical philosophy into that with purposeful value by means of revealing the true features of labor, so as to include it into the basic content of practice or human's free domain.

4. IT IS THE INTERNAL REQUIREMENT OF MARX PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY TRANSMITTING FROM THE "LABOR" TO "PRACTICE"

In Marx's opinion, we can only find the new world by criticizing the old world. Marx realizes the revolution of philosophy, and its foothold and original intention clash with the old philosophy. As we know, modern metaphysics are based on "ego", and it is also based on "the internality of consciousness", which leads to self-contradiction between the consciousness subjects in the essence and leads to isolation from the external reality, and perceptual activity. As a result, the perceptual activity and self consciousness exist in the way of externality and heterogeneity, thus the modern metaphysics is based on perceptual activities from the establishment of the self-consciousness. Therefore, different from the traditional philosophy, the basement of Marxist new philosophy is necessarily perceptual activity, and it is a breakthrough of modern metaphysics. In other words, it is practice. At the same time, Marx thought, material production labor is in the foundation position and the first eternal premise in the historical development process, so it should be the basis of all the practice. That is why Marx fully affirmed the priority of the productive labor in human activities. Accordingly, the practice is understood by textbooks of

Marxist philosophy explanation with a pattern of labor in China, namely as the only conquer and transformation of subject to the object. In fact, although Marx gives the significance of labor in practice, and attaches great importance to this practice forms of labor, he does not equate practice with labor. On the one hand, Marx reforms of the labor principles of the practical principle, and understands labor from a wide range of social relations. He always think that productive labor is always there and the dual relationship between human and nature, and is found in certain social relations in the modification of nature, in which the relationship is established and developed between people, thus to put labor into the practice concept, and become the practice with the most basic role. On the other hand, as Marx said, the practice does not only include natural material productive labor of direct transformation, also includes ethics and political activities, and human activity in the field of religion, art, etc.. In short, the practice is all human activities of changing the world, including man and nature, man and society, and all human relationships. It is all the process of social life, and a kind of generalized life practice, so practice is a general concept. Only such a practice can be understood as the basis of the extant perceptual world; only in this way to understand practice, can we say practice is one way of being, one is the existence of practicality. When Marx restored people's perceptual existence reality, he had to face the multifaceted relationship between people and nature, man and society, between people. If different activities are opposed to each other in all the kinds of field, and then the practice of totality is divided, which eliminates the integrity of the people. It seems that Marx's practice with abstract and general concepts are more than

labor. If it's purely based on all other human activity, labor will not take the responsibility. Therefore, Marx's philosophy will transit from the practice to labor, which is limited to the economic sense.

CONCLUSION

In a word, the uniqueness of Marx's practical philosophy was to find out the inherent relation between labor and practice in the practical philosophy of Aristotle, and gave labor the meaning of practice, as well as put the labor in the position of practice. Besides, Marx keeps to the standpoint of laboring people, and can see the internal connection between labor and practice. The research on practice from the perspective of labor helps to achieve the "labor into practice" and internal unity of labor and practice. By labor into practice, Marx expressed such a stand and expectation:

All including plain citizens in the middle and lower class can be subject bodies and be included in the practice system. They can be engaged in practice and labor in the meantime and they even meet the internal requirements of practice, just like those rational and mature ones. (Liu, 2009, p.9)

REFERENCES

- Arendt. (1999). *Human condition* (p.81). Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House.
- Aristotle. (2003). *Metaphysics*. Commercial Press.
- Liu, S. L. (2009). *Logic of practice* (p.9). Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press.
- Marx. (2000). *Economic and philosophic manuscripts in 1844* (p.58). Beijing: People's Publishing House.